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The Heart of the House

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WHEN Eden came home from a visit and asked for his mother, they told him that she had gone away—they weren't the sort that try to make excuses about heaven and angels, and it was better so. He took it as a matter of course, for a wise child doesn't question fate as we foolishly learn to question it later on.

He didn't understand why his father held him so close, kissing him in a way that frightened him and made him want to cry too. So he struggled away and went over to where his aunt sat swallowing down her tears (you couldn't fool him; he knew that when you cry inside it's just as much crying as when you cry outside, only you needn't be so much ashamed), and asked her:

"Where does it hurt you?" Then he climbed upon her knees. "Does it hurt you here?" he asked, touching her head, "or here?" and he touched her throat. "Nor your tummy?—a little bit your tummy?" But instead of telling him where it hurt, his aunt swallowed down her tears as hard as ever, and one or two would even have got outside if she hadn't dabbed at them cleverly

with her handkerchief. So Eden was really alarmed about the state of her health, and begged anxiously:

"Let me see your tongue." Then his aunt hugged him tight in the same scary way his father had, and though she didn't laugh, Eden saw that he had done something clever and felt as proud of it as if he knew what it was. But if a thing is clever once, any child knows that it's just twice as clever the second time; so he got down from his aunt's lap, and went over to his father and asked to see his tongue too. And just as he had known they would, they found him twice as clever, and he strutted out of the room meaning to go and find his mother and ask to see her tongue. Then he remembered that she had gone away on a visit, so he strolled into the kitchen; and at the sight of him Norah burst out sobbing. She didn't politely try to swallow her tears at all.

"Ain't he the living image of his ma?"

Now, Norah had often said that before. Indeed, that he looked like his mother was one of the things that people always said to him, but no one had ever cried about it before. You can imagine that all these tears, together

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with his mother's absence, had darkened his home-coming; and he wandered forlornly upstairs again.

He had a feeling that the house had changed a great deal since he left it. Then it had been dark, and there was no need of people hushing him and telling him to walk quietly, for who would want to run and make a noise in an unnatural place that was darker at noon than after the lamps were lighted? Eden had hated the thin streaks of sunlight, like long, white fingers, that pushed their way in through the cracks of the blinds, as if the sun were trying in spite of everybody to sneak in; they made the house look still more unnatural.

Now windows and doors stood open wide, there were flowers everywhere, and yet there was a disturbing, put-away, cleaned-up look to everything—the way your room looks after sweeping day (it takes, as you know, a long time for your room to get a lived-in feeling after a severe cleaning; it is as if part of yourself had been swept out with the dirt). Nevertheless it seemed good to Eden to have the house open, as it had been before his mother was sick, and he almost expected that she would run to the top of the stairs to meet him, calling: "Lovely Eden!"

Then he would answer, "Lovely mother!"

And she would say, "Darling Eden!"

And he, "Darling mother!"

Then it would be her turn: "Sweetie Eden!"

And of course he would answer, "Sweetie mother."

By that time they would both be laughing, and she would growl in a great, big voice, "My great, big Eden."

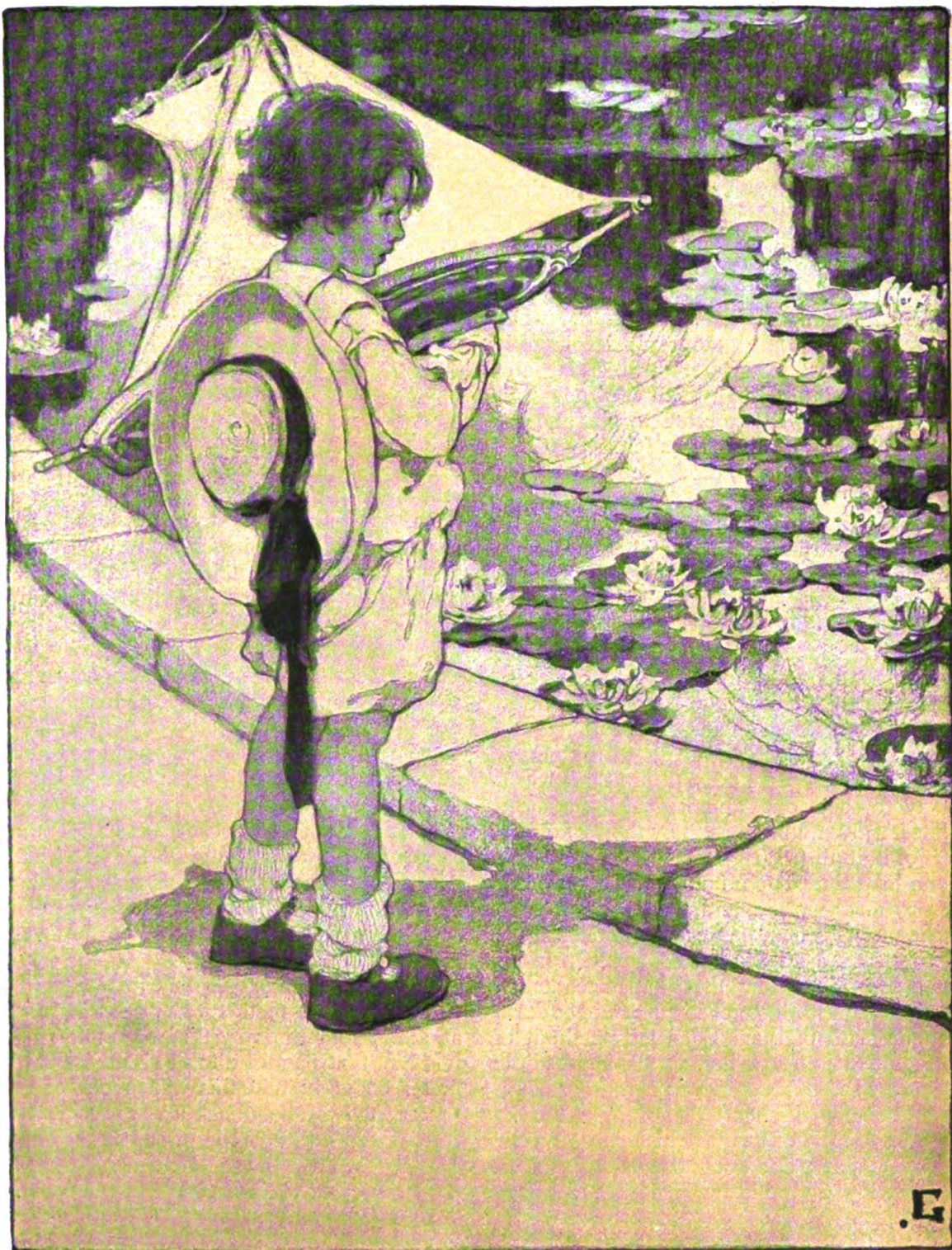
And he would say in a great, deep voice, "My great, big mother," and so it would go on, one name after another, dear, lovely little names, foolish names that nobody but a mother would think of calling any one. It was, you can see, a very silly game, and if Eden had been more than a little over four he would have seen how silly it was, and wouldn't have played it any more, in spite of his mother. Somehow mothers are glad to keep on the silly old games; they never grow up. But Eden, as I say, was very little; he hadn't even learned to be ashamed of kissing, and now he wanted dreadfully to hear his mother say "Lovely Eden."

His mouth was all ready to answer "Lovely mother," and he would, no doubt, have run up to her and hugged her knees and buried

his face in her skirts, which was what he liked to do. He didn't exactly know in words what he wanted, as you or I would know; he felt a tugging inside him and a queer, empty place, which, he knew, he must presently fill with tears. He didn't know in words, either, what made the house so different, as if it were ready for his mother to come and play; and he didn't know what it was that had frightened him so before, when the house had been all dark but for the long, greedy fingers that the sun kept poking in. But what frightened him now was the stillness; it slid up his legs in a cold shiver, it laid its heavy hand on his little shoulders, it made him glance fearfully behind him, to see if it weren't by chance following him. For there wasn't a sound in the whole great house except the tickings of the clocks and the outside noises that came in through the window. Now, a house has a great many noises of its own, and it ought to have. There should be the noise of people talking, the noise of Maggie and Norah at work, a little laughter, the rustling of papers, the occasional ringing of the front-door bell; but now everything was quiet, and Eden was afraid. You see, the heart of the house had stopped; it was for the time quite dead, and Eden couldn't know that the house was waiting for him to be its heart and start all the cheerful noises going again.

He drifted miserably into his mother's room; it looked as he hadn't seen it look for a long time; and it hadn't nearly as much of the dreadfully put-away feeling as the rest of the house. His mother's work and her work-basket were on the table, and her needle and thimble, as if she had been using them. It was a dear work-basket; Eden got all its empty spools for his very own, and was even allowed to play with the full ones; but as for the pins and scissors—well, about them, his mother had always been as unreasonable as Maggie.

The desk was open, and there was a book upside down on a little wicker table, and a favorite pair of slippers peeped out from under the bed. It almost looked as if his mother had only just gone out of the room, and would be back in a moment. Eden didn't know that between that *almost* and the way it had looked when his mother was really there, there was all the difference between life and death, but he felt it. It was as though the air of the room were full of the tears his aunt had shed when, for his sake,



Eden might go anywhere except
to the pond — but this was
very hard to remember.

she arranged the room, for then she hadn't even made a pretense of being brave and swallowing her tears; she had let them go sliding down her cheeks as they would. So the silence and the tears and everything all together overcame him, and he threw himself into his mother's chair and wept.

It was then that the first wonderful thing happened. He had cried only a moment—and, mind you, he had begun with the idea of crying a long time, for he was lonely and frightened, and, after all, only a little past four—well, he had just begun to cry when there came over him the most unaccountable comforted feeling. He stopped crying and looked up, and, though he didn't know it, it was his mother he expected to see, and the strange part of it was that he felt as happy as if she had been there, though nobody was in the room.

Eden wasn't lonely any more nor frightened; how he felt I can't explain any better than by saying that he felt comforted all through. It was then that he smiled for the first time, a dear, funny little smile, as if he had a nice secret that he was just on the point of telling—as if it were too nice to keep, and still so nice that he couldn't let it go. For the saddest part about a secret is that you can't tell it and have it a secret. You give it to the person you tell it to, and he keeps it until he gives it away to some one, and it gets littler every time it's given, until by and by there's nothing left of it at all. Well, Eden sat there smiling for a long time, two minutes, perhaps, feeling happy all the while, and then his eyes happened to light on a basket of toys over in the corner, the toys that were always kept in his mother's room, but that had been taken away when the place got so queer and so dark. At the sight of them Eden gave a shout of recognition, and soon he was pushing the little iron cars across the room, saying:

"Choog-choof-choof! Too-too!" For he was very proud of the natural steam-car noise he could make; and at the sound of his cheerful playing, all the little noises that had been scared away by the silence of the house came out of their hiding-places. Norah in the kitchen heard him through the open window, and before she knew it she was crooning over her work; Maggie remembered something to be done up-stairs and actually ran up the steps; then Eden's aunt came from her room where she had been crying, and his father from his where he had been looking straight ahead of him at nothing, and they opened

Eden's door and looked in. And Eden's aunt felt comforted because she had thought of the basket of toys; every one, indeed, felt better, for Eden had set the heart of the house beating again.

II

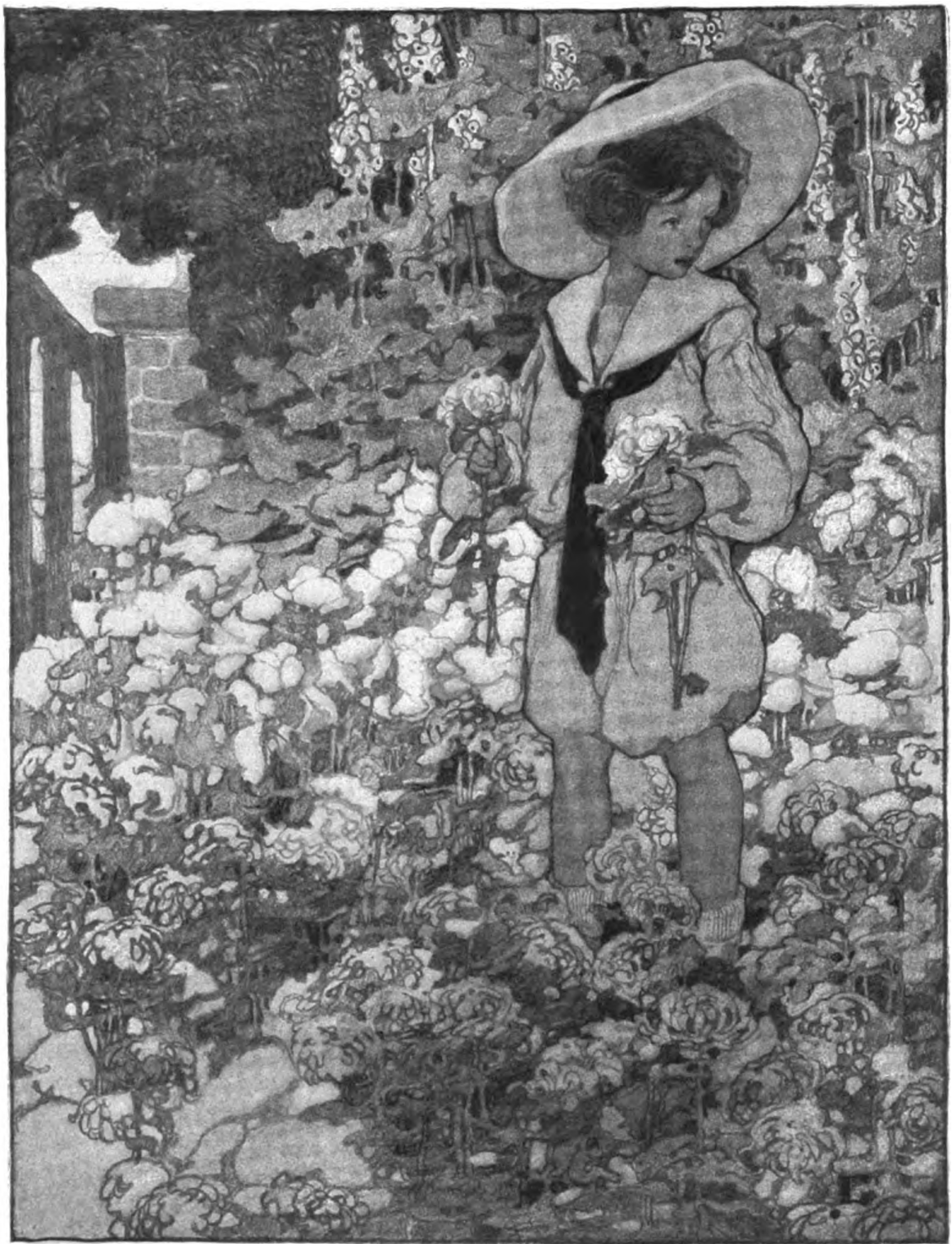


HE had always been what Norah and Maggie called "an old-fashioned child," and now he grew more old-fashioned than ever. It was, his aunt thought, as though he realized what had happened, and were trying to be good to make up to them a little. For instance, he no longer waked up in the night and cried for a light; he didn't make people walk through the dark hall with him any more; but though they didn't know it, this wasn't because he was trying to be good; it was because he had forgotten that he had ever been afraid of the dark. When he went into it, instead of its seeming big and lonely and full of uncanny animals, he felt as if he were going into a warm, cozy room. He never had a more taken-care-of feeling than when he woke up at night; and instead of covering his hand up tight, for fear that if he left it out a wolf would come from under the bed and get a nip at it, he slept now with one little hand hanging conveniently out of bed, for he had sometimes a comforting feeling, just before he went to sleep, of another kind hand holding his. And the reason, again, that he was so good when he woke up in the morning was the memory of his happy dreams, though he never remembered them in words.

It would be hard to tell just when he realized that his mother wasn't coming back at all. From the very first, something had told him that he mustn't ask his aunt and his father about it; that this wasn't one of the times when you could ask if she was coming this afternoon. "Well, then, to-morrow? To-morrow night, late? When?"

So his father was not right when he looked sadly at Eden and said to Eden's aunt, "How soon they forget!"

It may have been that Eden realized what it all meant one day when the washerwoman kissed him, exclaiming, "Poor motherless lamb!" and Maggie hissed at her, "Whist! Will ye be quiet!" If he did understand, he didn't show it; but he smiled at them both his mysterious little smile as if he were on the point of telling his dear secret, and that



She was there — just as he
was there — only
in a different way . . .

made Maggie kiss him and say, "Ain't he the darlin'!"

But the reason Eden smiled was that just as the washerwoman called him a "poor motherless lamb," there came over him the taken-care-of feeling. It had never come before when there had been any one else with him. That was why he liked to go off by himself, for he never felt lonely except when he was with other people.

By and by his father and his aunt began to talk a great deal to him about his mother. They told him how lovely and good she had always been, and how dearly she had loved him, and Eden got lonelier and lonelier every minute and he felt as though his heart would burst if he couldn't get out to the garden where he knew the taken-care-of feeling was waiting for him.

His father's eyes grew kind and he said to Eden's aunt, "He does remember. Poor little chap."

But Eden wasn't crying because he remembered; he was crying because they seemed to be taking something from him, when they talked so of his mother.

When his father followed him into the garden to comfort him, he found Eden playing by himself and singing a song without any beginning or any end, the kind of song you make up yourself and sing only when you think no one is around. But Eden had the sociable air of a boy who wasn't playing by himself at all.

Both his father and his aunt noticed that when they talked about his mother he grew restless, and his eyes pleaded with them, as if he were trying to say "Please stop." They put it down to his great sensibility, though they didn't really understand how it could be that, for when they would say to him, "Do you remember this?" or "Do you remember that?" he would shake his head and look very embarrassed and a little ashamed. For he knew well enough that he was disappointing them, and not being the clever boy that he liked to be; but a long time had gone by and he didn't remember much about his mother to put into words. The kind of things he remembered were not the sort anybody ever talked about, and so he, naturally, little as he was, couldn't know how to say them. He remembered how comfortable her lap was, and the way she had of putting her cheek against his, and the touch of her hands, and more than anything else the glad, safe feeling one had when one was with her, and how

she smiled and cried "Eden, Eden!" when he came into the room, so that he felt himself a very fine fellow just to have come in at all. You see all those things were so much a part of him that he didn't really know about them any more than he knew why one is happier when it is a nice day. And he missed them all most whenever they talked about her, which they did more and more often; for his father said:

"It's after all the only thing we can do for him, not to let him forget her."

He always listened to what they said, though it made him feel confused and uncomfortable, because, as he discovered presently, they were talking about a different person from the mother he remembered—and yet older people knew everything, and since they said it was his mother, that must be so, for of course no one can have two mothers.

After a time, Eden got so he could tell when they had been talking about her as soon as he came into the room, for it had a cold feeling to him, somewhat the feeling that the dark used to have. Perhaps it was that his father always looked so sad and lonely at those times; at any rate, Eden was always in a hurry to escape out of doors or to his mother's room, and he would scurry away as if he were running from the dark. For another wonderful thing had happened to Eden.

He had only to go by himself, and the most delightful ideas for games would come to him. He knew well enough that he didn't make them up himself, for they popped out of his head just as unexpectedly as ever a toy popped out of his father's pocket. He felt toward these games very much as he did toward the toys—as if some one had given them to him. And this wasn't all; at night when he was going to sleep, stories would tell themselves to him; he didn't have the trouble of thinking them up.

So you see what a happy little boy Eden was, though Maggie often shook her head and said:

"It scalds me heart! There he's nobody to play wid him, an' him alone the livelong day."

When Eden was nearly six, something happened that no one has ever been able to account for. His house was away from the village and stood quite alone on a hill, for his father and mother had loved each other so much that they hadn't cared whether they had neighbors or not.

You could see away for miles and miles,

and in the distance were humpy hills, which looked like processions of blue camels walking along the edge of the sky, Eden thought, and there was a curly silver river, and fields brown and green and red. Near the house were terraces, which led down to the rose garden, and beyond that were woods with big trees, and a pond with lilies; and Eden might go anywhere except to the pond. It was very hard to remember that one mightn't go to the pond. So one day when he had forgotten, his aunt talked to him about his mother and how good she had always been, and said that because Eden looked like her he must try to be like her. She ended with:

"It would grieve your mother very much if you were not an obedient boy."

And then the thing happened that neither of them ever understood. He was not a little boy who had bad tempers; the worst of him was, he forgot the things that he was told to do, and he would smile in an ashamed, puzzled little way when taxed with his fault, as if he had really forgotten for good and all or else had never heard.

"Didn't I know he was the smart one, I'd think he was a wee bit innocent," Maggie said.

So you see what an amazing thing it was that at his aunt's words he flew into a dreadful rage.

"I don't want to be like her, I don't want to be told!" he screamed. "I hate her! I'm not her little boy! I'm not her little boy!" It seemed to him that beside his aunt there was in the room a calm, white woman. He knew, all the time, that he was saying a dreadful thing, and that no one would ever love a boy who could act in that way, and his head knew all the time that he was talking nonsense. For like it or not, you are your mother's little boy forever and ever.

He was so angry that his aunt was frightened; she never punished him—she was too gentle to punish any one—but she went out of the room, and the calm, shadowy woman went with her. Frightened at himself and miserably feeling that no one would ever forgive him, Eden ran out to the garden.

When he came back his face had the smiling look it wore when the game had gone very well, for Eden was, I think, gayer than most boys. There was a gladness about him that made tears almost come to one's eyes, and now it fairly shone out of him, for while he was out in the garden he had found that only

the outside of him had been wicked and that it didn't matter, strange as it seemed, whether he said he didn't like the mother his aunt had talked about or not.

III



AFTER this, the calm white woman was always in the house. Eden didn't mind her, for though he guessed that she was the mother his aunt and his father talked about, he knew that she hadn't anything to do with him. She didn't seem even to realize that he was there. He knew that he might have gone up to her and said "Boo," and that she wouldn't have winked. Indeed she seldom stayed long after Eden came into a room. Usually he forgot about her, and when next he looked up she would be gone. It was she, he guessed, who had made the room feel cold and dark, but since he could see her, he wasn't afraid any more. She was rather beautiful in a cold, tiresome sort of way, but she didn't know how to look with kind eyes at a boy, and as for her having a soft lap or calling "Eden"—that would have been impossible. So after he had looked her over curiously for a while, Eden thought no more about her. He treated her just as he might have treated a grown-up who wasn't interested in boys—the kind that made him feel little and never like a fine fellow.

He noticed two things, however: that his father and his aunt were very fond of her, and that though they were fond of her, they couldn't see her.

Meantime the games in the garden went better and better, and it was exactly as if he had some one to play with. Especially when he was very happy, he could hear inside himself some one else laughing, and Eden would try and try to think whom he had ever heard laughing like that. For a long time he had lived on the edge of a new, wonderful happening, and when at last it came, it came in the most natural way in the world, as wonderful things always do.

One morning when Maggie was dressing him, he found himself saying, "She's coming to-day."

"Who's that that's comin', darlin'?" asked Maggie. She was soaping his neck and the part behind his ears that even a boy as old as past six can't do himself.

"Who's comin'?" asked Maggie.

"I don't know," Eden had to confess. He knew he'd been silly and that his head hadn't said those words at all; they had just slipped out, and though before they had said themselves they had seemed to have some sense, now they didn't mean anything at all.

"I don't know," he said again.

"Well, if you ain't the quare one," said Maggie, rubbing his brown neck until bits of white foam flew; and he caught some on his finger and dabbed it on his nose, and then wiggled his nose up and down, and both of them laughed. So Eden knew he had made up for the silly thing he had said.

Then he went out into the morning and ran down his favorite path, with his heart beating hard, because he felt so glad; and his aunt, who watched him from the terrace, thought to herself:

"He runs as if he were going to meet some one."

And the wonderful thing about it was that Eden was running to meet some one, and the deep-down part of him knew it, though his head didn't; so that is why it didn't seem strange at all when he saw her walking toward him along the path. He wasn't surprised or frightened. He ran toward her, calling:

"Dear, dear," and she answered, "Oh, Eden!" and then what happened Eden never could have told you, for he hadn't any words for it. Nor could he have said what she looked like, for try as he might he could never see her face when he shut his eyes, as he could see his aunt's or his father's. He could only feel how she looked. In the same way, he could only remember that, after she said "Eden" to him, he felt the same sort of gladness that he had felt when he hid his face in his mother's skirts and hugged her knees. But you mustn't think they behaved as if they hadn't met for a long time. It was only saying good morning in the right sort of way.

You can imagine that a boy like Eden and any one with the kind, gay face of his friend wouldn't waste time as grown-up people do; they went right to playing, and she had even more fascinating games for him now than those she had sent him—for Eden realized now where his games came from—and though she was a grown-up she could play better than he.

They were having such a good time that it was a long while before Eden noticed an interesting thing that made him feel quite puffed up with pride; and this was that,

though they had been talking right along, they didn't use any words. Eden knew that this kind of talk was a very fine thing to know how to do, and he stuck out his chest like one of his own pigeons, as he thought, "Auntie couldn't do that."

His friend laughed at him again, and there were tears in her eyes, she was so happy.

The next day he noticed another interesting thing, and this was that she had lost her shadow. Now Eden could run fast, but his shadow ran as fast as he, and at night it grew and grew so that in the old days it had used to frighten him. Especially in the dark it had been a fearsome thing, for he knew that it must be near him all the time, because as soon as they brought in a light, there it would be larger than ever; and it's the things you can't see but know are there, that you are afraid of.

"What did you do to lose your shadow?" he asked her.

But she smiled at him a young, little smile very much like his own.

"I wish I could lose mine," Eden went on. "They're no good."

At that she gasped a little and put her hands to her heart. Eden wondered whom he had seen do that.

"Dear," she said, "you will keep your shadow a long time yet. Shadows are kind and good. It's your shadow, you see, that holds you down to the earth. You couldn't stay here if you didn't have your shadow."

Eden was glad that there was some use in a shadow, and he looked at his with more respect. His aunt had told him some confusing things about the sun making shadows. He had seen through that, though he had been too polite to say so: although Eden wasn't very old, he was old enough to know how grown people wriggle out of answering your questions. No matter where he and his aunt started, they generally ended that he must be a good little boy.

He saw at once how reasonable was the idea that your shadow holds you down to the ground, and now that he thought of it, he couldn't remember ever seeing a flying bird with a shadow.

"But you're here without your shadow," he objected.

"I came back to find something," she smiled at him. "It was a long way to come. I thought I could never find my way back."

"And how did you find it?" Eden asked.

"I heard you crying," she answered him,

and a funny lump came in his throat, and for a moment neither of them spoke.

"Why didn't you come back before?" It was out now, what he'd been waiting to ask from the first minute.

"I did come back. I'm only a little more here than I have been all the time." Then Eden knew what he'd suspected; that it was she who warmed the dark up for him, and who made him feel so comforted.

He knew, of course, that she was different from the others, a thousand times dearer and sweeter, but different, so he never spoke about her to any one. You don't have to be very old to know that one doesn't talk about the things one feels gladdest or saddest about. And it made Eden so happy to be with her that he couldn't have talked about her, even if he hadn't been afraid that they would laugh at him if he said:

"There's a lady in the garden who has lost her shadow." He knew that would sound silly if he said it out loud—he knew the queer things grown people laugh about. That was one of the most confusing things about them—the way they laughed always in the wrong places. Then, too, they would be sure to ask him where she came from. How could he make them understand that she wasn't the kind that came from places? For she hadn't come from anywhere, neither was she going anywhere. She was there, that was all, just as he was there, only in a different way.

She was in the house too. He could hear her laugh and catch glimpses of her; she was all over the house, and when he played indoors she played with him. He wondered why it was that his aunt didn't say something about her. Very soon he found out why. It was because his aunt couldn't see her. Once his aunt came upon them so quietly that Eden hadn't heard her come; they were talking together in the delightful way that didn't need any words, when he heard his aunt close behind him. She bent over him and kissed him.

"How nicely you play by yourself," she said. "Are you having a good time?"

Eden almost answered, "But I'm not playing by myself." He looked from his friend to his aunt and back again; and he saw that his aunt couldn't see her, while she, with her kind look that dropped peace into one's heart, was looking at his aunt. The sadness went out of his aunt's face; then she sighed:

"I can't believe sometimes that she's gone."

And Eden had hard work not to cry out, "But she's not gone, she's here!" But something kept his mouth closed, and he sat there with a toy in his hand, smiling his quaint little smile.

This incident gave him a great many questions to ask of his friend.

"Do you know auntie?" was the first one.

"I did long ago," his friend answered, and she sighed. "I thought she had forgotten me."

"Why," he asked next, "don't you ever come into the room when my father's there? Why don't you come where my aunt is?"

At that she wrung her hands and said: "I don't know. I can't tell you. They don't let me."

Now Eden hadn't asked why it was that his aunt couldn't see her when he could, for that, somehow, seemed natural enough; but he didn't understand how they could keep her out when they couldn't see her, and he said so.

But there was a look on her face that made Eden say, "Don't cry," and she answered so faintly that he could hardly hear the words:

"They've forgotten me!"

Then Eden comforted her and coaxed her, just how he couldn't tell, and soon she looked at him in her glad way that made him feel warm all through.

It all gave him a great deal to think of, and when he went to find her in the garden next day he had his little explanation ready.

"You see," he told her, "they are so busy remembering about my mother that I suppose they haven't time to remember you."

She repeated after him: "They talk about your mother?"

"Yes," he said, "all the time. My mother," he explained proudly, "is dead." For although it is, of course, a very sad thing to have your mother die, it has its compensations, if you were only a very little boy when it happened. Having your mother dead makes ladies give you extra large pieces of cake when your aunt takes you to call on them, and makes everybody specially nice to you. So little by little, Eden had grown rather proud of having his mother dead. He began to behave about it as if it were something clever he had done himself.

He went on in a rather important tone: "She was very good, but not like you a bit. I don't think you'd like her."

"You don't think I'd like her?" she asked,

and there was a look in her eyes that Eden had never seen there before.

"No," he said, "you're not a bit alike, and I don't like her at all."

She gave a queer little gasp of an "Oh!" and put her hand to her heart again.

"Why, dear, don't you like your mother? And how do you know we're not alike? Do you remember her?" It was her turn for questions.

"Before she died, you mean?" Eden asked.

"No. I used to, but I don't any more."

"Then how do you know what she's like?" she pressed him.

That was an easy one.

"Oh, I've heard them talking so much that I know just what she's like."

"They like her, then?" she asked, and Eden knew that something was hurting her very much, though he couldn't think what it could be.

"Oh, they like her more than anything," and to comfort her he came close to her. "But I love you lots the most," he said. "I never have liked her. She makes the room cold, and she doesn't like me." He let slip out what he hadn't meant to tell, that he had seen his mother. He wanted, you see, to justify himself, for he knew that every right-minded person would be shocked at the idea of his not liking his mother, and he looked at his friend anxiously to see what she thought of him. But she didn't seem shocked. He knew she wasn't even thinking of him at all.

"I never understood," she moaned to herself. "I never understood." Then she cried out, "Oh, poor, poor people!" Eden waited patiently until she should get back to him again. This she did suddenly, with:

"How do you know she doesn't like you?"

"I can tell by the way she acts," Eden confessed, his finger in his mouth, much afraid of being called silly, for he knew that his mother wasn't really there, not as his father and his aunt were.

But his friend didn't think he was silly, and the tone in which she asked, "Do you mean you see her as you see me?" almost frightened him. She seemed quite a different person from the one he had known all along; sad and angry and hurt. Eden faltered out:

"Yes, I see her, but generally she goes out when I come in."

"What does she look like?" his friend asked eagerly.

"She's very beautiful, they say, and very, very good. She gets grieved when I'm bad,

auntie says, but I don't think she cares what I do. They can't see her," he added proudly. for now that she didn't think he was silly to see people that weren't there, he thought himself clever to see things his aunt and his father couldn't.

"Could you see her?" he asked.

"I *must* see her," she answered seriously. "I must try and try till I see her. I thought they had forgotten. I couldn't know they'd forget this way."

"You don't think it's bad for me not to like my mother very much?" he questioned.

A great many wonderful things had happened to Eden without his being surprised—for nobody had told him they were wonderful, so of course he couldn't be expected to know—but what happened now did surprise him, for with her sweet face full of anger she cried to him:

"She's not your mother! Don't believe them! She's not your mother!" Then she called in such a dear, appealing way, "Eden, Eden!" that Eden's heart almost burst, for he knew there was something she wanted him to say to her, and he didn't know what it could be. All he could do was to whisper "Dear, dear," in his soft, little voice, and again she cried to him, with a very anguish of appeal, "Darling Eden!" and all he could answer was "Darling," and when he saw how sad she looked, and how all the gladness was gone from her eyes, he almost sobbed himself, as he said:

"Please don't cry! You mustn't cry!" He felt so sorry for her that he spent the next few minutes swallowing his tears, while she sat there pale and silent beside him. It seemed to Eden that though she was beside him she was a long way off, as grown-up people so often are, when they are thinking about the unsociable things that a little boy can't understand. He brought her back to him with:

"Who is my mother, if she isn't?" For though he felt inside him that somehow she knew more about things than his father and his aunt did, yet he was used, on the other hand, to believing that his father and his aunt knew everything, as is very proper for a little boy to believe.

"And if she's not my mother, who is she?" he asked quite triumphantly.

At this his friend sprang to her feet, and her face was full of anger and jealousy.

"She's not anybody," she cried. "She's stolen your mother's place. She's made them

forget your mother. She's not real. She isn't any one."

There are moments when the simplicity of children makes them wise, and Eden was wise when he answered:

"They think she's real, 'cause they talk about her."

She wrung her hands in her pain.

"They've made her real," she cried. "If I'd only known before!"

Presently as Eden started slowly for the house, she called after him, "My Eden," and though her voice was low and soft, the way she said it quivered all through him, and for the next few days when he didn't see her he tried and tried to think who it was that had ever said to him "My Eden" in just that way.

If he didn't see her, he felt her in the house more than ever before. He felt her in the room even where his father and his aunt sat, and he realized vaguely that something strange was happening, something that he couldn't at all understand. So he stayed out in the garden as much as he could, though it was lonely without her. He wondered if she had seen the calm, white-faced woman he had thought was his mother, and presently he remembered that he hadn't seen her himself since the day he and his friend had talked about her in the garden. And, indeed, since then the white woman had seemed less real, and Eden found himself wondering if he had really seen her after all.

That there was something unusual going on under the calm surface of things every one felt.

"I don't know what ails me, but I feel as if some one was comin'," Maggie said.

"This house ain't right," Norah agreed, and without saying anything to each other, Maggie took her sewing out of doors, and Norah fixed her vegetables on the steps.

Grown people, too, are sometimes afraid of the things that are there but that they can't see, and there was a sense of strain, a sense of waiting in the house, that one couldn't disregard. Perhaps more than any one, Eden's father and Eden's aunt felt it, but since they knew more than any one else in the house, they took less notice of it, for how can you

talk reasonably about things you can only feel?

But once Eden found his father smiling in the way one does when one remembers something very dear and very pleasant, and he drew Eden to him and kissed him, and Eden felt more taken care of than he had since the afternoon he had talked last with his friend.

It was as if they all were listening to something that none of them could hear, as if the house were listening to itself, and a spirit of expectancy were floating within it. This it was that drove the simple ones out of the house, and that made the other two talk shyly and about commonplace things. It was almost as if the hands of time had been turned back to the day when the heart of the house stopped beating; there was renewed something like the waiting hush that houses have when some one within their walls is fighting for life. And again it was Eden who broke the magic quiet and set the heart going again. It all happened out of doors, for there was something in the quiet of the house that drove his father and his aunt outside, though they said it was the beauty of the evening that drew them. Eden had been thinking a great deal, you may imagine, about the strange things his friend had told him, and at last he asked shyly:

"Was my mother always good?"

And then it was that the house stopped waiting.

For with a little hug for Eden his aunt said:

"No, but she was lovely, even when she was naughty."

"Do you remember," his father said, "how she used to call to Eden?" He hadn't thought about it for a long time; at first it had hurt him too much to remember, and in time he had ended by almost forgetting.

Then Eden saw his friend, standing near them, dropping her kind, glad look into his eyes, and as she looked at him, the most wonderful thing of all happened to him, for in one brightest moment he remembered.

And in their language that didn't need any words he shouted:

"Darling mother!" and though his aunt and his father didn't know it, they heard him.

